

The Africa Open answer is blowin' in the wind...

The story of the Africa Open will almost certainly be the wind... and whoever tames it. The forecast from SA Weather Services says there's a lot of taming to be done at East London Golf Club: The weatherman says the gentlest winds will be 20-kilometre-an-hour southeasters on Sunday, but, for the rest, it will be 30km an hour and upwards.

And with R5-million up for grabs, you can be sure that there are a lot of players wanting very badly to tame it.

Chief amongst them will be Charl Schwartzel. After he fell away in his final-round challenge for last week's Joburg Open, he had one foot on the plane to Abu Dhabi in his chase for euros in the very lucrative Race to Dubai. But the South African's curiosity was stirred when he noticed a newspaper report showing the positions after Joburg Open on the Sunshine Tour Order of Merit: Missing was Andrew McLardy's name. Now a US resident who campaigns mostly on the European Tour, McLardy had not renewed his membership, which meant Schwartzel was within chasing-down distance of the top of the Order of Merit, and the winner of that gets an invitation each year to the Nedbank Golf Challenge. Schwartzel was out of the airport as quickly as he could, and on a plane to join a class field in East London.

Countryman Richard Sterne was also unable to get his challenge going properly in the Joburg Open, and he is not too sure he likes the thought of playing in the wind. The 2008 Sunshine Tour Order of Merit winner battled during the pro-am, unsure of club selection and shot strength up on the hills and down in the valleys of East London Golf Club. He said: "The wind is tossing me around like a paper bag. If I played golf here every day, I'd still shoot 90!"

Argentine's Angel Cabrera doesn't speak much English, but he didn't need to as he shook his head in bewilderment on the ninth. The 2007 US Open champion relies on having the ball in the air for a long time for his prodigious distances, and that's not a good thing when the wind blows.

Retief Goosen, like Schwartzel, saw his Joburg Open challenge fade in the final round. But he will be relying on a canny game to cope with the wind. "You have to keep it low here, so I will be making sure I get that right in practice before the tournament," Goosen told a media conference.

And Northern Ireland's Darren Clarke, just added to the 2009 ballot for the World Golf Hall of Fame, is no stranger to playing in the wind. Anyone who has the greatest links courses in the world on his doorstep is going to be able to cope with wind. He's getting back into the kind of form which saw him as a realistic contender for a major, and he finished tied for sixth in last year's WGC Bridgestone Invitational.

In the end, it's going to take a lot of patience. And Doug McGuigan reckons there will be a few casualties: "I hope they plan to have a lot of ambulances on standby this week," he said.